

## OBITUARY

SIR RICHARD SOUTHWOOD 1931–2005



Professor Sir Richard Southwood FRS, our most senior entomologist, ecologist and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford died at his Oxfordshire home on Wednesday 26th October 2005 at the age of 74. He was christened Thomas Richard Edmund, TRES for short, and thus possibly pre-ordained to become a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. Sir Richard who was better known to his contemporaries and colleagues simply as Dick, was always happiest in the field observing insects and contemplating ecological problems.

His interest in entomology was sparked off at the age of three with a wish to know the names of the insects and plants he encountered on his parent's dairy farm near Northfleet, Kent. He gradually accumulated a series of named insects from a number of local sites and a collection of entomological books. His continued enthusiasm for insects led his father to take him to the Natural History Museum, at the age of eight, to meet taxonomists to ask for advice on which groups of insects to study. Jack Balfour-Browne reputedly advised him "to specialise in Heteroptera".

He joined the South London Entomological & Natural History Society in 1946 and published his first paper, on insects from Kent, in *The Entomologists' Monthly Magazine* in 1947, aged sixteen. His undergraduate career was spent at Imperial College, the best place in the world to study insects. He graduated from Imperial in 1952 gaining a first and the Forbes Medal for best student. Vacation work in C.G. Johnson's department at Rothamsted led to his first substantive paper on Heteroptera in 1949. He subsequently moved to Rothamsted to undertake his Ph.D and submitted his thesis on the subject of "Some studies on the systematics and ecology of Heteroptera" in 1955. He often admitted to enjoying his short stay at Rothamsted, and it was here that he met and married Alison (née Langley).

It was during this period that he began to publish a long series of papers on British Heteroptera, often in conjunction with Dennis Leston (another former member of our society). Their teamwork eventually led to the publication of the Wayside and Woodland book *Land and Water Bugs of the British Isles* in 1959. This classic reference work on British bugs has increased in price more than one hundred-fold since publication, an indication of its true value to British biologists. It is a

delightfully informative book to read, though some of the taxonomic keys are far from easy to interpret when looking at dried specimens.

Dick returned to Imperial from Rothamsted, initially as Reader in Insect Ecology, rising eventually to Professor and Head of Department and Director of Silwood Park Field Station (1967–1979). He undertook pioneering research on insect-plant communities, insect abundance and diversity and insect succession. His thought-provoking paper in 1961 entitled ‘The number of species of insects associated with various trees’ provoked a flurry of research by ecologists throughout the world as they rushed to produce similar data-sets confirming his ideas. During this period he wrote his hugely influential *Ecological Methods* which was published in 1966. This is THE entomologist’s bible. It has been so successful over the years that it is now in its third revision, co-authored by Peter Henderson.

Dick was also a naturally-gifted administrator, who early on recognised the importance of interdisciplinary research. His expertise in these matters, led to the creation of a formidable team of entomologists and ecologists at Imperial and later at Oxford. Despite being a manager he was always extremely approachable and would always listen to his colleagues’ concerns. He also had a considerable talent at remembering faces *and* names and would greet colleagues by their first names even after an absence of ten years or more. As a consequence his departments were always a hive of friendly activity and at the cutting edge of science.

In 1979, Dick moved to Oxford to become Linacre Professor of Zoology and Head of Department, a position he held until 1993. Here he succeeded in bringing together the various groups studying molecular biology, animal behaviour and ecology into a larger interdisciplinary team. This sparked novel hybrid work including that of Richard Dawkins who moved from research on animal behaviour to evolution. He was also highly successful in attracting new talent to his department, including the late Professor William Hamilton and Lord May, former President of the Royal Society. The year 1984 saw the publication of another classic entomological treatise *Insects on Plants* in conjunction with Donald Strong and John Lawton. He co-authored a book with Barry Juniper on *Insects and the Plant Surface* (1986). His lectures to undergraduate students while Head of Department and subsequently as Vice Chancellor of the University were published under the title *The Story of Life* in 2003.

He acted as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 1989–1993. During his period of office, he was appointed Presidency of the Campaign for Oxford, the first fund-raising campaign ever organised by the university, and he succeeded in raising £340 million surpassing the target by more than £100 million.

Dick also played an influential role in wider public life. As chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in the 1980s, he produced the report, *Lead in the Environment* (1983), which described the dangers to human health of lead in the atmosphere and led to the adoption of lead-free petrol. He later became chairman of the working party established by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1988 to advise on bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). The report is full of sound precautionary advice and an immediate recommendation was the proposal to prevent any part of an animal suspected of having the disease from entering the food chain. The compulsory slaughter of BSE-affected cattle was introduced with effect from 1988. However not all the report’s advice was acted upon. To quote the *Sunday Telegraph* of 27 November 2005 ‘In this capacity he (Southwood) played an important part in events that have become a classic cautionary tale of the dangers of mixing the conditionalities of science with the glib certainties of politics’.

Sir Richard's contributions to ecological research, administration and public policy resulted in many awards, including a knighthood in 1984, and numerous honorary degrees. He was elected President of the British Ecological Society (1976–78), a Fellow of the Royal Society (1977) and President of the Royal Entomological Society (1983–84).

It is strange that the Society somehow missed the opportunity of offering the Presidency to Sir Richard and I suspect this was because he appeared to be so busy dealing with matters of state that we dared not ask. I am sure he would have been delighted to accept if offered and would soon have been in his element among fellow entomologists. He was still collecting in the field not long before he died. However we were honoured that Sir Richard was able to officially open the Society's new Pelham-Clinton building at Dinton Pastures on 27th June 1993. He had been on the Society's journal editorial committee since 1958 (then called the 'paper panel') and was refereeing papers until two years ago. He was also a member of the Hering Memorial Fund panel for many years, and to quote Malcolm Scoble, invariably the first to respond to the paperwork and always made very thoughtful comments.

The first time we really met was when I arrived at Silwood Park on a Sunday afternoon to begin my entomological career and the place was virtually deserted with no familiar faces, as all the overseas students had just departed home and the new year's intake of M.Sc. and Ph.D. students had yet to arrive. I was very uncertain whether to proceed with a career in research and had eyed an advertisement for a post in the tax inspectorate with great interest: I was at a very low ebb. Dick happened to pass by, took command, found me a room and helped to make my bed. Of course, I stayed, and have enjoyed entomology and Dick's company ever since.

JOHN BADMIN

Personal details have been obtained from a variety of sources. However I wish to thank Bernard Nau for providing the selected references on British Heteroptera cited below.

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## SHORT COMMUNICATION

**A further record of *Gerris lateralis* Schummel (Hemiptera: Gerridae) from Hampshire.** – Jonty Denton recorded *Gerris lateralis* new to Hampshire (*Br. J. Ent. Nat. Hist.* **18**(4): 252). Rather belatedly, I would like to record that I found this species, rather sparingly on the 18th April 1982 on a small, shallow backwater on the Leckford Estate, North Hampshire (SU3737). This was in a rather similar habitat to that recorded by Jonty Denton, for a pond skater which appears to make itself less obvious in the field than do other members of the genus. I would like to thank the Trustees of the John Spedan Lewis Trust for permission to collect on the Leckford Estate. – ERIC PHILP, 6 Vicarage Close, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7BB.

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